

Weak Words Are Not Enough
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Members of Congress, it is an honor to testify before this committee about the crimes of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is the greatest threat to civilization since Nazism and Stalinist and Maoist Communism. Like those movements, ISIS has a millenarian, utopian ideology that turns mass murder into an ideological duty, and worse, a religious virtue.

On November 25, 2015, twenty-one human rights organizations, genocide scholars, and religious leaders wrote to President Obama imploring him and the US Department of State to recognize that **ISIS is committing genocide not just against Yazidis, but also against Christians, Shi'a Muslims, Turkmen, Shabaks and other religious groups that ISIS labels "infidels" or "apostates."**

Recent reports suggest that the State Department may be preparing a forthcoming statement declaring the targeted mass killing, rape and enslavement of the Yazidi community under ISIS to be "**genocide**." This is a welcome step in the right direction, but the clearly documented facts on the ground and our country's treaty obligations under the Genocide Convention require that our government include Christians and these other groups as victims of genocide as well.

According to Presidential Study Directive 10, preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.

Designation of a group as one targeted for genocide would have significant policy implications for American refugee policy, because such victims would be given a rebuttable presumption that they have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their religious or ethnic identities. The US is a party to the UN Convention and Protocol on Refugees. We have international legal obligations to offer aid, asylum, and other protections to such victims. This is why it is critical that a presidential statement on the crimes against humanity against Middle Eastern Christians, Shia Muslims, Yazidis and other religious groups be given the proper name, which is **genocide**.

Why does it make a difference whether these crimes not be named "crimes against humanity" or "war crimes," and instead be called "**genocide**?" Ethnic Cleansing is a euphemism for forcible displacement. "Ethnic cleansing" is not a term used in the Rome Treaty of the International Criminal Court. It has no legal meaning in international law.

In 2007, three epidemiologists and I conducted a studyⁱ of the effect of using the words "ethnic cleansing" rather than genocide in four of the most recent genocides: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur. Our team counted the number of uses of the terms "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" in The New York Times, UN press releases, law journals, and statements by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

We came to four important conclusions:

1. Use of the terms has no relationship to the number of people who have been killed. 8000 killed at Srebrenica was ruled "genocide" by the ICTY. Yet a U.N. Commission of Inquiry ruled that over 100,000 killed in Darfur (now over 300,000) was judged not to be sufficient evidence of intent to commit genocide by the government of Sudan.

2. Choice of the term to be used is determined by willingness to take action to stop the killing. When the terms “ethnic cleansing” or “crimes against humanity” were used, it indicated unwillingness to take forceful action to stop the crimes. These **weak words never motivated the use of force. Indeed they were probably chosen because the decision whether or not to use force had already been made.**

3. **It was not until the term “genocide” was applied to the crimes, that force was used to stop them.**
 - This occurred three months into the genocide in Rwanda when the State Department finally acknowledged on June 10, 1994 that “acts of genocide” in Rwanda were the same as “genocide”, which is defined in the Genocide Convention as “acts.” This declaration came after the US had voted in the UN Security Council to pull UNAMIR troops out of Rwanda on April 21, 1994 and voted against sending in UN forces in May, when the killing was still underway. By June 10, the Rwandan Patriotic Front had won the civil war and stopped the genocide. 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered. The US and other world powers were not willing to risk the life of a single soldier to protect them. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has convicted over fifty leaders of genocide and courts in Rwanda have convicted hundreds more.

 - The same denial emerged in Bosnia, as the world press and the US government called the massacres “ethnic cleansing” from 1991 until the Srebrenica massacre on July 11 - 13, 1995, which provoked a NATO conference on July 21, and resulted in NATO bombing of Serb forces on August 30. The bombing brought Serbia to Dayton to agree to a ceasefire, division of Bosnia, and a NATO peacekeeping operation. The Bosnian civil war came to an end. The ICTY and International Court of Justice have ruled that the massacre at Srebrenica was genocide.

 - Kosovo was called “ethnic cleansing” until US War Crimes Ambassador David Scheffer noted “indicators of genocide” on April 7, 1999, followed immediately by bombing of Belgrade, which brought Serb surrender and NATO occupation of Kosovo. Six Serb leaders were convicted of crimes against humanity by the ICTY and the Kosovo Tribunal has convicted other perpetrators.

 - Regarding Darfur, following a careful empirical survey of evidence of genocide among Darfuri refugees, on September 9, 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that “genocide has occurred and may still be occurring in Darfur. We believe the evidence corroborates the specific intent of the perpetrators to destroy “a group in whole or in part.” He also said, “However, no new action is dictated by this determination.” A decision had evidently been made by the President not to involve US or NATO military forces in stopping the genocide, so all that followed were ineffective increases in the African Union monitoring force, but no direct military intervention by NATO or the US. Although the International Criminal Court has charged Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and two others with genocide in Darfur, they have never been arrested and brought to trial. Sudan has three active genocides today. It is an example of the failure of the UN to stop genocide, and of the African Union and states-parties to the ICC Treaty to enforce international criminal law.

4. When the term “genocide” is used to describe crimes against humanity, use of force is possible. **When the crimes are only called “ethnic cleansing” or “crimes against humanity,” it is a sure indicator of lack of political will to take forceful action to stop them.**

On September 3, 2015, members of The International Association of Genocide Scholars, the world’s largest organization of experts on genocide, stated in an Appeal to Congress: “ISIS’ mass murders of Chaldean, Assyrian, Melkite Greek, and Coptic Christians, Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Sunni Kurds and other religious groups meet even the strictest definition of genocide.”

Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs, whose presence in Syria and Iraq predates Christianity by 4,000 years, were among the first converts to Christianity. They are clear victims of religious genocide, both for their Christian faith, and for the historical heritage their ancestors made to the world. This is genocide.

If the United States fails to adequately recognize the full scope of the intentional destruction of these groups, it will constitute a failure of the values of tolerance and plurality for which our republic stands.

Failure to call ISIS’ mass murder of Christians, Shia Muslims, and other groups in addition to Yazidis by its proper name—genocide—would be an act of denial as grave as U.S. refusal to recognize the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Calling genocide by its proper name cannot wait for a ruling by a court of law. Under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide we have an obligation to work towards prevention and punishment.

The IAGS and the twenty-one religious leaders, many from both political parties, also urged the Obama administration to encourage the U.N. Security Council to refer the case against ISIS to the International Criminal Court.

Congress has advanced important measures to recognize these atrocities for what they are: Genocide. Congressman Jeff Fortenberry introduced H.Con.Res 75, which recognizes the collective persecution of religious minorities as genocide, and to date the resolution has over 150 bipartisan cosponsors. Congressmen Franks, Speier, Smith, Sherman, Rohrabacher, Eshoo, and Fortenberry have introduced House Resolution 447, supporting the establishment of a Syrian war crimes tribunal to try ISIS, especially for its mass rape of women and girls.

There are nearly seven million Middle Eastern - American Christians in the United States diaspora. Congress and the President should recognize that the genocide perpetrated by ISIS has not stopped with the Yazidis. Middle Eastern Christians and other groups have suffered the same level of targeted and systematic crimes of extermination and genocide.

Their blood cries out no less. Their protection is as imperative as that of their Yazidi brothers and sisters. We urgently request that Congress, the State Department, and the President publicly acknowledge and denounce ISIS crimes against humanity against Yazidis, Christians, and other religious minorities by its proper name: **genocide. Weak words are not enough.**

We urge you to act quickly with our allies and the United Nations to ensure that the ongoing, genocides, crimes against humanity, and war crimes of ISIS are halted, prevented, and punished. The religious freedom and dignity of the human race depends on our leadership.

Respectfully submitted,

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ⁱ 2007 Blum, Stanton, Sagi, Richter, 'Ethnic cleansing' bleaches the atrocities of genocide. European Journal of Public Health, Oxford University Press, 1-6. Accessed 7 December 2015 at http://genocidewatch.org/images/By_Stanton_07_05_18_Ethnic_cleansing_bleaches_the_atrocities_of_genocide.pdf